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ABSTRACT

How does one help children develop literacy where they have limited access to books and libraries? How can one overcome the many obstacles to literacy faced by schoolchildren in Nigeria? These are the issues addressed in this paper. Obstacles such as sociocultural factors, English as a Second Language and as the medium of literacy and instruction, the educational system, and lack of access to books and libraries all combine to keep the literacy rate low--38% in 1991. Four projects conducted by the Department of Library Science at the University of Nigeria are examined as a means of further insight into the nature of the problem and may possibly suggest ways literacy might be promoted, such as: storyhours, library lessons, studies of reading interests, and the study of traditional (stories, play and song) and modern (television) media in the socialization process. These studies have discovered the following: (1) school libraries, where they exist, are the principal source of books for Nigerian schoolchildren, but if the school does not have a library, texts and recreational books are provided by friends and families; (2) schools and libraries played almost no role in children's cultural development, which is primarily nurtured by parental storytelling; (3) there is evidence of inadequacy in the visual education of the children, even given the rich artistic traditions of Nigeria; most primary schools lack electricity, but audio cassettes, videotapes, radio and television are common in society; and (4) children are hungry for books and respond enthusiastically to them. Recommendations for improving literacy include increasing access to books, addressing educational concerns such as second language and ineffective teaching methods, and developing literary mediation activities. (Contains 16 references.) (MAS)

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Literacy Without Libraries: Promoting Literacy Among Schoolchildren in Nigeria

by Virginia K. Dike

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LITERACY WITHOUT LIBRARIES: PROMOTING LITERACY AMONG SCHOOLCHILDREN IN NIGERIA

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How does one help children develop literacy where they have limited access to books and libraries? How can one overcome the many obstacles to literacy faced by schoolchildren in Nigeria?

Background to Literacy

Literacy, defined as the ability to read and write, is a relatively recent phenomenon in Nigeria, as in many developing countries. Oral traditions characterized the past. Literacy was introduced through the propagation of the new religions and the colonial experience. While Nigerian languages were put into written forms as part of this development, literacy has largely been associated with the English language. Formal school systems were also introduced by the new religions and the colonial government. These have expanded rapidly, especially since the attainment of independence in 1960.

Convinced of the importance of literacy for development, the Nigerian government has invested heavily in education at all levels. State governments spend between 30% and 40% of their budgets on education, while local governments charged with responsibility for primary education spend even more (Arifayan 1993). Yet in spite of the recognized desirability of literacy, its achievement has not been easy. While education has expanded dramatically, many still do not receive formal education. And education has not expanded without overstretching facilities, leading to a much decried fall in standards. The literacy rate has increased only slightly over the past few decades, to 38% in 1991, and many children leave school without learning to read and write.

Why has the development of literacy proved so difficult?

Obstacles to Literacy

There are a number of obstacles to literacy facing schoolchildren in Nigeria. These include a range of socio-cultural factors, the second language problem, the nature of the educational system, and lack of access to books and other resources for reading.

Socio-cultural factors

There are a range of socio-cultural factors affecting the development of literacy. Nigerian cultures are traditionally oral cultures, upon which an alien print culture has been superimposed. According to Fanoiki (1985,35) "our culture and tradition have been built on literature as story-telling, anecdotes, recounting of festivals." Recreation traditionally takes oral and social forms

(Ogunsheye 1972), and the high value placed on sociability discourages a solitary activity like reading. Alemna (1986,68) attributes the poor reading habits of children to "the difficulty of an individual socialized into the oral medium of communication to transfer to the reading medium." Because of this oral background, parents are unlikely to read to their children even if they can do so. Storytelling is the predominant form of literary mediation for parents, literate and nonliterate alike.

Secondly the nonliteracy of parents hinders reading development. The foundations of reading development are laid in the early years of life. Early childhood experiences with books, as well as spoken language, prepare children for reading even before they learn to read themselves. But the majority of Nigerian parents are not literate. Because of this they cannot serve as role models for reading, nor can they share books with their children by reading aloud to them. They are unlikely to provide exposure to books by having them in the home, giving them as gifts or taking children to libraries. For these reasons children miss early childhood experiences with books and reading and encounter both only when they start school.

Current economic conditions are detrimental to the development of literacy in several ways. Most directly, poverty may prevent parents from sending their children to school, thereby depriving them of formal literacy education. If the children attend school, parents may not be able to afford the textbooks, not to mention books for voluntary reading.

Poverty affects literacy in less direct ways as well. Schoolchildren may be distracted by hunger or overcome by fatigue. Their afterschool hours may be filled with domestic chores or outside work, leaving them no time for assignments or reading. A deteriorating economy also creates harassed and distracted adults who are less able to provide traditional care and education for their children, thereby weakening the foundations for learning in school.

The Second Language Problem and Mother Tongue Education

The second language problem is basic to the development of literacy by Nigerian schoolchildren. Children come to school speaking one language, their mother tongue, but in school they are introduced to a second language, English, as the medium of literacy and instruction. This means they are faced with two tasks at once; learning an unfamiliar language and learning to read. While they continue to communicate in their mother tongue outside the classroom, they may never attain literacy in it, since the emphasis is all on English. Even so, the majority of pupils also fail to attain permanent literacy in English by the end of primary school.

A number of educators have concluded that the problem lies with the use of a second language as the medium of instruction in the early years of primary school and advocate instead

the use of the mother tongue. In this way children learning to read can build on the oral foundation of early childhood as beginning readers normally do. Since they would be learning in the language they know, learning would be more effective and the transition to written language more firmly grounded. Mother tongue education for the first three years of primary school is stipulated by the National Policy on Education (Nigeria 1981), and recent moves have been made to implement this more fully. The Ife experiment in which Yoruba was used as the medium of instruction throughout primary school and English taught as a subject, attempted to establish the efficacy of education in the mother tongue (Afolayan 1976).

Objections, however, have been raised to mother tongue education. Some question whether it has really been established that one learns better in the mother tongue, whether, for instance, the Ife experiment was a success. Others point to the practical problems. It is difficult to carry out the policy where there is a multiplicity of minority languages, as in Nigeria with its estimated 300 or more, or where there are many dialects of a language. Moreover, there are almost no teaching materials, even in the major languages. Still others point out the need for a language of wider communication, for further education and for unity within the country and interaction with the world.

As a result of these problems, some would advocate going straight into English or switching over as soon as possible. But primary education in English has not proved every effective in Nigeria. Children come to school knowing only their mother tongue, yet are expected to learn in a language they do not understand. Perhaps the biggest obstacle to learning English and learning in English is that many teachers themselves have not mastered the language. They are more comfortable speaking their own language, and do so except when dictating notes from the board or reading class texts. As a result pupils merely memorize the notes without understanding. They lack the opportunities for speaking and reading that would lead to the mastery of the language.

The Educational System

Not only the language of instruction but the educational system as a whole presents obstacles to the development of literacy. A system characterized by rote memorization and regurgitation of facts does not encourage the development of readers. Children have only to memorize the lesson notes or basic textbook to pass their exams in a subject. They never acquire the skills for extracting relevant information from a variety of sources or the habit of reading widely for information and pleasure. "Reading" is conceived of very narrowly as memorizing notes for school exams; therefore, the need for it ceases when the last exam is passed. Education

is not seen as a broad or continuing process, reaching out in different directions and lasting throughout life.

Arifayan (1993) among others has cited the teaching methods employed from kindergarten to the university as the main reasons Nigerians are not a reading public.

Unoh (1968) has also cited the methods employed in teaching reading as an obstacle to literacy. The look-and-say method follows a similar pattern of memorization, focusing attention on single words without gathering up the thought sequences of the passages.

The content of the curriculum can also serve as an obstacle to literacy. The focus is narrow, centered on a few topics repeated year after year. As a result children lack the broader background knowledge which would help them understand what they read. Promotion of literacy is, therefore, tied to improvement of education, so that it will foster rather than obstruct its development.

Access to Books and Libraries

Limited access to books and other reading materials is another major obstacle to literacy among Nigerian schoolchildren. Mention has already been made to the lack of books in most homes. There are also few books in the schools. According to a recent World Bank study report (Arifayan 1993, 7):

> less than one per cent of primary school pupils in Nigeria have access to textbooks. This means that less than one out of every hundred pupils in the country could lay hands on the textbooks needed to give them the basic foundation in education.

This dismal picture is supported by observations at Nsukka; one observer reported seeing only one textbook, this is in the hands of a teacher, during a three-week stay in a primary school.

Children have little access to books through libraries. As an example, in 1987 Anambra State, with an estimated population of two million children under 14 years, had a total of 2,271 children registered as borrowers with the 11 public libraries in the state system. As of 1990 the State Central Library in Enugu had only 3000 volumes in its children's library. The Nsukka Divisional Library, recently re-opened after more than a decade, has about 100 books for children.

Primary school libraries are also few and far between. During the 1986 Anambra State Best School Library Competition, only 30 primary school libraries were located in the 2,071 primary schools in the state. Not one was found in the Nsukka educational zone. (Anambra State School Libraries Association 1987) Over the country as a whole, primary school libraries are usually found in private schools, not in the vast majority of public schools.

There are few books on the market, either in the occasional standard bookshop or in the ubiquitous market stalls. The drastic fall in the value of the national currency since 1986 has

reduced the number of foreign children's books to a trickle. The deterioration of the economy has likewise affected local publishing, which was just finding its feet in the more prosperous days of the 1970s and early 1980s. While new titles still do come out, many earlier published ones are no longer available.

Aside from the question of availability, the published output for Nigerian children is limited. Since 1960 Nigeria has built up a modest body of juvenile fiction in English. If these several hundred titles were available, they would represent a good start toward meeting the needs of schoolchildren. The late 1970s and early 1980s also saw an outpouring of titles for youth and the appearance of a few picture book for younger children. More of all these are needed, in addition to reference books, nonfiction topic books, and books in the Nigerian languages.

These, then, are some of the obstacles to literacy. They include such socio-cultural factors as the relatively recent introduction of literacy into an oral culture, the nonliteracy of parents, widespread and deepening poverty; the use of a second language for literacy and instruction; the nature of the educational system; and the limited access children have to books and libraries.

Projects with Nsukka Schoolchildren

Having examined the problem, where do we begin to look for solutions? I propose to begin by looking at several small projects with upper primary schoolchildren in Nsukka, a town in Ibgo-speaking area of eastern Nigeria. In most cases these involved staff and students of the Department of Library Science, University of Nigeria using the resources of the Children's Center Library, a voluntary library organized by the University Women's Association. These projects might give us further insight into the nature of the problem and suggest ways literacy might be promoted.

The projects are as follows:

1. Storyhours

Since 1988 students of the Department have been visiting primary schools in Nsukka town and nearby villages to conduct story-hours and book-sharing sessions. Pairs of students conduct a story-hour of 30 to 40 minutes in Igbo and English, the balance depending on the language of the storytellers and the English comprehension of the children. The storyhour includes stories, poems, riddles and songs and the sharing of picture books and science magazines. They are structured around themes, such as animals or countries of the world, with the intention of enriching the education received in the classroom. Their purpose is also to foster the enjoyment of oral and written literature and encourage the use of books and other library materials for both information and pleasure.

2. Library Lessons

Staff of the Department of Library Science have conducted library lessons for fifth and sixth grade pupils of the same schools, in this case bringing them to the Children's Center Library. This has taken several forms but emphasis is on learning how to use library materials through activities and projects. The one analyzed for this paper involved learning about various animals using nonfiction topic books, nature magazines and junior encyclopedias. Worksheets of questions were distributed to help guide the search, with sample questions including: where does the animal live? what does it eat? where did you get the information? Pupils were also asked to draw a picture of the animal and write three things about it. The aims were to evaluate their comprehension and learning skills as well as the appropriateness of the library collection in relation to their reading ability.

3. Studies of Reading Interests

Two library science students have conducted recent studies of reading interests in two Nsukka primary schools. In 1993 Nkiru Ezeh carried out a study of the reading habits of primary five pupils using interview and observation during four booksharing sessions. Areas investigated included the family background, sources of books, reading level and the types of books preferred. This year Ndidi Nwankwo investigated the response of primary five pupils to picture books. She set out to discover what children like in books, how well they understand books in English and what things about the language attract them, what style of illustrations they prefer and how well they can interpret the pictures, and what types of stories and characters appeal to them.

4. Traditional and Modern Media in Literary Socialization

A related study of interest is the PhD thesis of Obiajulu Emejulu on Traditional and Modern Media in the Literary Socialization of Selected Nigerian Children (University of Ibadan, 1990). The researcher selected urban and rural settings in Anambra and Oyo States, looking at 28 primary schools (including six in Nsukka), four libraries (including the Children's Center Library), playgrounds, and the mass media. The study examined the role of traditional media such as stories, play and songs, and modern media such as television in the socialization process; the contributions of schools, libraries and playgrounds as settings; the mediators of activities; and the patterns and strategies of literary mediation.

What can we learn from these studies?

Observations on Access to Resources

First, what access do children at Nsukka have to resources for literacy in terms of books and libraries, cultural resources, and audiovisual and modern media?

1. Books and Libraries

Children at Nsukka, like most Nigerian schoolchildren, have limited access to books and libraries. Almost two thirds (65.4%) of the children Emejulu interviewed in Anambra State had never been to a library to borrow books. Of those who had, about equal numbers had used school libraries (21.1%) and the two public/children's libraries in the vicinity (20.5%). Of the 13 selected schools, two had a modest library, one had a revolving class library for pupils who had contributed books, two had a few books in the head of school's office, and eight had no library provision of any kind. This report and others (Bozimo 1983) suggest that school libraries, where they exist, are the principal source of books for Nigerian schoolchildren.

But where do children in the typical public school without a library get books? All the children in Ezeh's study received books from their parents, but these were limited to school texts and exercise books. Only three out of the 30 were also given recreational reading materials by parents. The most important source of recreational books proved to be friends. Almost half of the children (46.7%), most of them girls, shared books within a network of friends, with the result that the few storybooks received from parents and the public library had a far wider circulation. Bozimo (1983), who studied reading habits at the Ahmadu Bello University staff school, likewise found friends to be an important second source for reading materials (after the school library), especially among the girls. The third source was the nearby public library, which was a source of books for 5 children. Even though its collection of 100 books was very small, this source was under-utilized by the children.

2. Cultural resources

Cultural resources are vital to a child's socialization, both in their own right and in laying the foundation for reading. Emejulu's study indicates that cultural resources remain very much a part of children's lives. The children knew and shared oral literature in the form of lullabies, proverbs, tongue-twisters, riddles, songs, and of course stories. The greater number of these were in Nigerian languages, but some were also in English. Storytelling was alive and well. Almost all the school children (99%) reported hearing stories, the exception being the few househelps attending the school. Similarly, Ezeh found that 93.3% of the children were told stories by their parents. (Conversely, only 10% of the parents read stories to their children, even though over half of them were teachers.) Interestingly Emejulu found that peers as well as parents played a major role in mediating stories (61.2%), lullabies (24.4%) and dances and games (47%), among others.

However, schools and libraries played almost no role at all. Most storytelling and traditional play forms took place in informal settings such as homes and playgrounds and were mediated by parents, other family members and peers. Only half of the children ever heard

stories from their teachers, usually as an occasional time-filler after exams had ended rather than as part of a regular educational program. Given the importance of cultural resources and the enthusiasm of children for them, this represents a gap and an opportunity.

3. Audiovisual and modern media

Pictures are vital to a child's development of visual and verbal imagination. Exposure to pictures develops skills necessary for reading as well as interpreting a range of visual media. Yet there is evidence of inadequacy in the visual education of the children. This is ironic given the rich artistic traditions of many Nigerian cultures, including Igbo culture. Emejulu found that audiovisual and other nonbook media did not feature in literary mediation programs in most schools and libraries. And while art may be on the timetable, the occasional art class usually consists of children being required to copy a model as closely as possible. Perhaps this explains why the children in Nwankwo's study found it difficult to interpret pictures unless they were clear and simple depictions of familiar everyday experiences and objects.

A detailed look at modern media is beyond the scope of this paper. Most primary schools lack electricity and very few have any media requiring equipment. However, such media as audio cassettes, videotapes, radio and television are common in the society. An interesting finding of Emejulu was that more children view television (90.4%) than listen to radio (48%), even though radios were much more accessible to them. They did not seem to consider radio a medium relevant to children, while they demonstrated a keen interest in television programs and had definite ideas about their favorites. In light of this, much more could be done in terms of adapting traditional and modern literary forms to television, as was done in the case of Chinua Achebe's novel Things Fall Apart.

Observation on Reading Level and Response to Books

What can we learn from these studies about the children's reading level and response to books?

Reading level

First, the children respond positively to books. They enthusiastically welcome literary experiences and enjoy looking at books. But language problems and their limited reading ability quickly become apparent. In the words of one storyhour report:

> Although the children found the jokes quite amusing and the stories exhilarating, it was quite a task having them draw any reasonable inference or lessons from them and have this communicated in English. Even when asked to speak in Igbo there still was little response from the pupils. No doubt the pupils showed genuine interest in the books given out to them to read, but most were incapable of reading. The few who did read were unable to interpret what they read. Most were content with merely looking at the pictures in the books.

> On the whole, the pupils displayed remarkable intellect when the level of communication became Igbo and when the discussion was centered around things of everyday life in their surroundings. Their enthusiasm for books and reading was also pronounced but their reading and comprehension ability was much too low for their level and showed they have been introduced to reading (if at all) much too late.

In her study of reading habits Ezeh also found that the children showed enthusiasm for reading when books were shared out to them but found it difficult to sustain interest if they encountered too many unfamiliar words. Half of the children (11 out of 15 being girls) read picture books well and understood what they read. The other half read with difficulty and understood little or nothing. Concerning reading rate, 17 were able to complete only one picture book in the hour, 10 read 2 books, and 3 read 3 books. Only two of the girls selected juvenile novels to read. In terms of comprehension and speed, girls were the better readers; they were also most likely to be voluntary readers.

The library lessons at the Children's Centre Library also revealed a wide range in reading ability, although even the best were beginning readers. A few (8 out of 48, or 16.7%) successfully completed the worksheet on animals, with scores of 90 to 100%. On the other hand, a significant number (11 out of 48, or 22.9%) comprehended very little, with scores of under 40%. These pupils copied a few words out of context or copied someone else's responses about another animal. Some appeared to tire or give up, leaving the last answers blank. The average score was 62.9%. Only a few were able to go beyond the most straightforward questions, by for instance, picking out a striking characteristic of an animal, such as the size of a whale or long neck of a giraffe.

Background knowledge

One observation made was that the pupils showed very limited background knowledge and this hindered comprehension. For instance, many had not idea of the continents and what animals were likely to be found where. As a result, they identified cheetahs as being found in Europe, reindeer and elephants in South America, and kangaroos, camels and tigers in North

America. Only 27 of the children, of 56.3% were able to identify the home continent of the animals. It was also interesting that they demonstrated no greater familiarity with African than non-African animals, even attaining a higher average score for non-African animals, (7.38 compared to 6.44). The best papers were on giraffes, zebras, elephants and whales, bears, wolves, and the worst papers were similarly divided. This could be partly due to the fact that some of these African animals are not found in Nigeria or are rarely seen. The animals they indicated familiarity with were local domestic animals like cats, pigs, rabbits, monkeys and fish.

This has implications for the curriculum and library programs. If the curriculum were broadened or pupil's background knowledge extended through library programs, they would bring greater resources to the written word and be more likely to understand what they read.

Familiarity as an aid to comprehension

Related to this is Ezeh's observation that children's reading preferences were strongly influenced by the need to understand. Their favorite types were folktales and Bible stories. When asked why they liked these stories, they responded:

- the story is familiar 43.3%
- I understand the story 30%
- the story teaches a lesson 26.7%

Folktales are likely to be familiar to children because of the strong storytelling tradition in the culture. Even if the folktale is from another culture, the story patterns are likely to be familiar. Bible stories are known to the children through church and Sunday school and Christian religious knowledge, a primary school subject. Both folktales and Bible stories have strong moral lessons, another expectation children bring to their reading, deriving in part from the oral tradition.

Previous studies (Odejide and James 1979) had found it difficult to ascertain whether children preferred African or non-African titles because of the paucity of African ones. But this study, which included equal numbers of the two, found a strong preference for books with African background (63.3%). Those who chose non-African books were likely to be poor readers

attracted by the colorful illustrations and limited text of foreign picture books. When African and non-African books on the same theme were paired, children found it easier to understand the African version. For example, they understood and enjoyed the Nigerian picture book Only Bread for Eze more than Bread and Jam for Frances.

Literacy in the mother tongue

This preference for local background did not, however, extend to language. Almost all (90%) of the children preferred books in English to those in Igbo. There are a number of factors which might influence this preference. The Igbo language children's books are very few, so there is limited selection. Most lack colorful illustrations. Children may have trouble reading Igbo because they are switched to English before mastering the written language. Moreover, the reading level is often too advanced and dialectical differences make reading difficult. There is almost nothing in Igbo at the beginning levels, which would be appropriate for children learning to read.

Visual literacy

It is often felt that children use the pictures to help them understand the story. But Nwankwo found the children in her study needed to hear the story in order to interpret the pictures. Only very clear and colorful illustrations on themes from everyday life could be easily understood. These included Emeka's Dog, a Nigerian beginning reader describing how a cat's eyes are different from ours; Izzard, the story of a boy from the Virgin Islands and his pet lizzard; and The Poky Little Puppy, who dug a hole under the fence and went out to see the wide world. All have naturalistic illustrations in full color. However, the children misinterpreted many of the pictures in Horton the Elephant, with its cartoon art and combination of foreign and fantastic elements, and Madeleine, with its foreign setting and distorted figures. They were confused by the depiction of fantasy in Where the Wild Things Are and could make little of the abstract drawings in Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears even though it is a Nigerian story and the animals depicted are familiar ones.

It might be noted that African and non-African pictures and stories could both be understood as long as they featured familiar, everyday experiences, as with common pets, and had fairly naturalistic illustrations. But books with distinctly foreign settings and elements of fantasy were difficult to understand, as was abstract and cartoon art. This is not surprising if we consider the limited experience the children have with pictures and their limited background knowledge.

Conclusion: What Can Be Done?

It has been seen that children are hungry for books and respond enthusiastically to them. They are eager to read and learn from books. Yet many obstacles stand in their way. Our task is to find ways to build on that enthusiasm and enable them to become literate. How might this be done?

1. Providing books

Children cannot learn to read if there is nothing for them to read. A basic step toward literacy is, therefore, provision of books. Nigerian children need:

- books which are based in their culture, in the languages they speak and reflecting their culture and environment;
- books which relate to the world around them, beginning with the familiar and leading beyond to new knowledge;
- books which they can understand, at beginning reading levels in both English and Nigerian languages;
- books with illustrations which will enhance their understanding of the text and develop visual literacy skills;
- books which appeal to them.

Which books appeal to Nigerian schoolchildren? These studies provide a few hints. They enjoy humorous stories, the language of fun of Tikki Tikki Tembo and absurd situations in Why Animals Should Definitely Not Wear Clothing. They like stories with a clear sense of morality,

in which justice is done, the downtrodden triumph, the wicked are punished. They like books with many colorful and clear illustrations. They like to read stories, but especially familiar stories they can understand: folktales, Bible stories, and stories of everyday life.

But how can these books be provided for children? This paper has suggested the importance of libraries in making books accessible to children. It is certainly much easier to promote literacy with libraries than without them! So one strategy is to find ways of establishing and equipping libraries for school children, if not in the school at least within reach. A current World Bank project represents an effort in this direction, with books being sent to schools and a model library established in each local government area. The Children

s Centre Library and Abadina Media Resource Centre are already established libraries providing services to schools in their localities.

Ways also need to be found to provide local books for children. Another paper would be needed to examine the problems of book production, but I will mention one project initiated by school librarians and others. The IBBY, Nigerian Section, assisted by funding from Unesco has been working to produce a series of nonfiction titles reflecting the local culture and environment. These are on a number of topics in the areas of culture (marriage, naming ceremonies), history and geography (the Niger River, seasons), and science and technology (trees, computers). They will be a step toward filling a major gap, providing books both for teaching/learning experiences and voluntary reading. Another approach is to organize workshops to create materials at the school or local government level. Experience has shown that teachers produce beautiful teaching resources during their student days or on special occasions, but this is not translated into better resources for day-to-day teaching. Ways could be found to provide the motivation and materials, to teachers, librarians, and pupils, to create resources for learning.

2. Changes in education

Literacy could be promoted by changes in education. First, if the curriculum could be broadened to extend the knowledge and experience of schoolchildren, they would bring a richer

background to reading which would aid comprehension. This is the aim of the storyhour and library lesson programs described in this paper and of the Abadina Media Resource Centre library use education program (Ogunsheye 1987, Appendix 1).

Secondly, current teaching methods are not conducive to literacy. The pattern of rote memorization of lesson notes does not foster reading with understanding and does not encourage wide reading or the development of reading skills. Yet, while this is the common method, the National Policy on Education advocates something very different. The key then is to find ways to implement the policy's vision of an education which is learner-centered and resource-based. This can be done through teacher education, workshops for teachers already in the field, and provision of school libraries to provide the necessary learning resources to support these methods. Implementing this educational approach would be a step toward creating good readers.

Thirdly, solutions need to be found to the language problem in Nigerian schools. The present practice seems to offer the worst of both worlds. Many children fail to attain permanent literacy in either English or the mother tongue, and as a result, fail to learn in school. Efforts to promote literacy are hindered by the failure or inability to draw on the resources of oral literature or the spoken language background of the children. However the language problem is resolved, teaching children to read in a language they do not understand does them a great disservice. Literacy in the mother tongue must be taken seriously, with the necessary materials provided, and ways must be found for children to master English in both spoken and written forms.

3. Literary mediation

The above factors indicate the need for a strong program of literary mediation to encourage children in their efforts toward literacy. Such programs are especially important given the low reading level of many pupils, the difficulties posed by reading in a second language, and the limited materials available for reading. School libraries and schools could do much more that they are doing at present. Emejulu found that only four out of 28 schools had library periods for literary mediation activities. Only about half of the children were told stories by their teachers,

and this only occasionally. Mediation of oral traditions and other cultural resources took place primarily in informal settings, not in schools and libraries. Yet cultural arts are included in the national curriculum and there is provision for cultural activities in the timetable.

One school has what might be a model for literary mediation in its reading/story club. Held in a classroom well appointed with graphic displays, the club features storytelling and reading aloud, by either the teacher leading the club or by members. The club encourages members to read widely on their own to "gain a passport to the world." Members are also encouraged to bring books from home which can be read by all and discussed. this idea relates to the circulation class libraries built up by pupils in several schools and informal networks of book exchange among friends, both of which utilize the peer group to promote literacy. Mediation by teachers and pairing of pupils for reading are also ways of bringing along weaker readers.

Sometimes the problems standing in the way of literacy seem daunting. The obstacles are so many and the resources for overcoming them often so few. Yet the solutions are known. It is true they entail substantial change and considerable--

massive government support for book production and libraries, a transformation of the educational system, reorientation of teachers. But fortunately it is also possible to move bit by bit, taking small steps to provide books and create resources, conducting workshop, working with teachers and librarians. When I remember the faces of children and their eagerness for books and reading, it seems worth continuing the struggle for literacy, with or without school libraries.

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